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Many doubt Carter's claims that Cuba trains Katangese

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The Carter administration's claims of Cuban involvement in the training of Katangese rebels for their invasion of Zaire's Shaba Province are being met with considerable skepticism within some intelligence circles in Washington and elsewhere.

In fact, some elements in the intelligence community simply do not accept the claims and say there is no solid evidence of such Cuban involvement.

These views, which sharply contradict President Carter's statements and those of White House aides, come from a variety of sources including Washington intelligence officials, Belgian and Israeli intelligence personnel, and both military and diplomatic people in Washington. The views also fly in the face of the publicly advanced statements of Central Intelligence Agency director Stansfield Turner and Defense Secretary Harold Brown.

'Circumstantial' evidence

The evidence presented by both Admiral Turner and Secretary Brown to support the claims of Cuban involvement is viewed as "circumstantial" by many of those who have seen it.

Some of the sources speculate that the CIA has been under considerable pressure from the White House to come up with corroborating support for the administration's claims.

As far as Washington's diplomatic community is concerned, some people close to the issue say they see absolutely no evidence of Cuban involvement in the Zairian situation.

That, of course, is the line being taken by Cuban President Fidel Castro — a line that was

adamantly put forward May 30 by Cuba's Vice-President Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, in a speech to the United Nations.

According to Sen. George McGovern (D) of South Dakota, the Cubans told him they had had nothing to do with the Katangese recently. They said they had trained Katangese only to fight in the Angolan civil war about two years ago.

A meeting with Lane

Dr. Castro went so far as to call in Lyle F. Lane, the head of the United States "interest section" in the Swiss Embassy in Havana, to deny the Carter administration claims.

Cubanologists point out that this was the first time that Dr. Castro had taken the unusual step of meeting officially with Mr. Lane, a step that amounts to tacit acceptance of the interest section as a form of limited diplomatic relations.

Neither Washington nor Havana has done that before, and the view among Cuban specialists is that Dr. Castro obviously felt the issue was important enough to break with precedent.

According to some sources in Washington, the White House is basing its claim in part on intercepted Cuban radio broadcasts. But a source in the intelligence community said those broadcasts are not clear and could easily be read two different ways.

A call for evidence

Some intelligence community members wonder, however, if the White House claims are simply a reference to the fact that some Katanga tribesmen have been in Cuba in the past 10 years or so and that they, like hundreds and perhaps thousands of other Africans, have had schooling on the island.